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SUBJECT: POPE BENEDICT XVI'S STRONG WORLD PEACE DAY MESSAGE

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

11. (C) Summary. Pope Benedict XVI's first World Peace Day message, released in December, contains strong arguments of both religious and political nature. The 14-page document entitled "The Human Person, The Heart of Peace" follows some familiar philosophical themes, but also reflects Benedict's increasing readiness to engage on issues in fairly direct language (by Vatican standards). Taken together with his other holiday season comments -- and awaiting the January 8 Papal address to the diplomatic corps, which will cap the seasonal emphasis on international affairs -- the Peace Day message argues that all people have a common duty to seek peace and a common moral framework within which to do so. The Pope emphasizes religious freedom, the harmony of faith and reason, the right to life, non-violence, the environment, social and economic justice, human rights, international law and international organizations, and the essential role of God and the Church in these worldly concerns. He names a few specific countries of concern, primarily in the Middle East. In context, the Pope is -- *inter alia* -- clearly denouncing terrorism, but also urging the US and other states to take care in combating it. End summary.

Peace as Gift and Task

12. (U) The Pope stresses that respect for the person (i.e. human dignity) promotes peace and thus lays the foundation for an "authentic integral humanism". He calls on people to recognize natural law -- an internal moral logic which applies to all people and governs their interactions -- as a part of their common humanity. Benedict emphasizes several key corollary themes: the right to life and religious freedom; the natural equality of all; the "ecology of peace"; the peril of modern reductionist thinking about man's nature; human rights and international organizations; international humanitarian law; and the role of the Church in protecting human dignity.

Right to Life and Religious Freedom

13. (U) In the course of the argument, the Pope sounds alarms about widespread threats to life -- including armed conflicts and terrorism along with abortion, euthanasia, experimentation on embryos, and hunger. With a typical Ratzingerian balance, he denounces the persecution of Christians in particular and of religious believers in general, citing especially regimes which

impose a single religion on everyone, as well as secular regimes which foster denigration of religious beliefs.

Natural Equality of All

¶4. (U) The Pope sees inequality as a prime root of conflict, particularly inequalities in access to essential goods (such as food, water, and shelter) and between men and women. Common human dignity requires an acknowledgment of the essential equality of all, says Benedict, and failure to do so puts peace at risk. The Pope mentions the grave deprivation of Africans in particular as leading to violence and decries the continuing exploitation and subjugation of women in some cultures.

Ecology of Peace

¶5. (U) Benedict stresses the importance of respect for nature as a prerequisite for peace and makes a similar connection with regard to energy supplies and the ever-increasing competition for resources. He is concerned for the fate of people who cannot afford expensive energy, and for the potential injustices and conflicts which may be provoked by the competition. The Pope writes that environmental destruction and hoarding of resources cause conflict because they result from a deficient understanding of human development.

Human Rights, International Organizations, and Reductive Visions of Mankind

¶6. (U) The Pope utterly rejects concepts of humanity or of God which encourage violence. he adds that indifference to man's true nature -- a reference to reductionist or secular trends -- also leads to authoritarianism. True and stable peace requires respect for human rights; but such absolute rights cannot safely rest on a relativist foundation. Benedict quotes Mahatma Gandhi in support of the link between rights and duties. His point is that human rights are an absolute, and must be based on an equally absolute commitment to the nature of man's relationship to the divine. Benedict also approvingly invokes the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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Humanitarian Law and States, Role of the Church

¶7. (U) The recognition of inalienable human rights is linked to the creation of international humanitarian law; but the Pope laments the lack of respect for this. He mentions in particular last summer's conflict in Lebanon, where the duty to protect the innocent and avoid involving civilians was "largely ignored". The appearance of new forms of violence, such as modern terrorism, make it urgent that international humanitarian law be fully reaffirmed and applied universally. Benedict says specifically that "the scourge of terrorism demands a profound reflection on the ethical limits restricting the use of modern methods of guaranteeing internal security". He argues that since now many wars are not formally declared, states must establish clearer rules governing violence. The Pope includes a strong call for nonproliferation, reduction, and dismantling of nuclear weapons.

Comment

¶8. (C) The Pope reinforced these points in his remarks during his Christmas "Urbi et Orbi" message and at the New Year's Day mass at St. Peter's, during which he singled out Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone (his Secretary of State) and Cardinal Renato Martino (head of the Justice and Peace dicastery) for special praise. The fundamental point for Benedict, as expressed in the

World Peace Day message, is that every person has a divine duty to seek peace, that all humanity shares an inbuilt moral compass which facilitates this quest, that God is at the root of all human morality and thus of all human rights, and that (as he said in Regensburg) reason and faith are complementary rather than adversary. That pure religious message expresses itself in more practical political appeals as well -- for religious freedom in the first place, but also for an end to violence, for social and economic justice, for stewardship of the environment, for the support of international organizations and international law. Most specifically, the Pope in his holiday messages referred to Lebanon, to Israelis and Palestinians, to Darfur and other strife-ridden quarters of Africa, to Sri Lanka, and to the evil of nuclear weapons.

¶9. C) Taken together and in context, the Pope's statements show him as increasingly firm in addressing temporal world problems, though grounded always in theology. He vigorously denounces terrorism, and no less vigorously calls on nation-states to abide more fully by international law and the protection of civilians. In this, as in his remarks about nuclear weapons, he appears to have the United States in mind as well as others.

¶10. (U) Year-end is traditionally a time for the Holy See to focus on international affairs; the culmination will come with the Pope's annual address to the diplomatic corps on January 8, which we ardently await, and will report promptly.
Sandrolini